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AUTHOR Wahab, Zaher
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ABSTRACT

An indepth account of the conflict around the education of black students in Portland, Oregon, begins with a summary of the history of segregated schools since 1867. The paper presents a multidimentional analysis of school segregation and integration. Educational statistics are cited illustrating that academic achievement of blacks, who today comprise 20 percent of the students in Portland's public schools, is very low. Concern over racial segregation in the city's public schools first surfaced in the early 1960's. Conflicts since that time up to the present have generated numerous committees and commissions, a student transfer program, desegregation plans, and accounts of institutional racism encountered by black students bused to white schools. The final part of the paper describes the Black United Front (BUF), which questions both the theoretical-juridical underpinnings and practical outcomes of busing. The BUF has demanded parent involvement in the education of children, in changes in the curriculum, and in selection of teachers and principals. (MLF)

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The Portland Public School System: From Panacea to Battleground

Zaher Wahab
Lewis and Clark College

Paper presented at the 25th annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, March 18-21, 1981, Tallahassee, Florida.

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The Portland Public School System:
From Panacea to Battleground
Zaher Wahab
March 1981

"The Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion and no teaching of truth concerning Black folk, is bad .... Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts; it inspires greater self-confidence; and suppresses the inferiority complex. But other things seldom are equal, and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge, and the Truth, outweigh all that the mixed school can offer."

--W. E. DuBois

"I have a dream that one day ... the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood..."

--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"It is my conviction that God ordained segregation."

--Rev. Billy James Hargis

"The white community, and its leadership, has not really committed itself to the goal of integration ... The Negro problem is really a white problem."

--City Club of Portland,
Racial Justice Report (1968)

"In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

--Warren, C. J., Brown V.
Topeka, Kansas Board of
Education (1954)

"We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto."

--Baum, The Wizard of Oz

The City and its Blacks

Portland, The Rose City, is dubbed as "the most liveable city in America." Portlanders take great pride in the city's cleanliness, beauty, tranquility, high standard of living, cosmopolitanism, harmony and liberal politics. While such claims are largely true, there is also a seamy underside to metropolitan Portland. For the 25,000 blacks, life in this "most liveable city in America" is as wretched as any ghetto in America. High unemployment and low income, welfarism, substandard housing, crime, substandard schooling, low quality of life, police brutality, inadequate social services, grim future and neglect dominate life. For the blacks in Portland the American dream is one protracted nightmare. Portland's blacks are confined to the northeast central section of the city called Albina, and are thus rendered invisible. Life for blacks and poor whites in Albina is so intolerable and their faith in the system so diminished that the Black United Front has appealed to the United Nations to intervene in the situation.

Black Education

Among the blacks in Albina educational attainment is limited and academic achievement very low at all levels of schooling. The educational establishment and "the civic leaders" in Portland have failed its blacks and the poor miserably. The following information illustrates the problem. In 1960, 70% of Portland's blacks were grade school, 22% high school and 6% college graduates. By 1970, 42% had finished high school. Black students have consistently scored lower than whites on achievement tests. In high school, blacks are underenrolled in both vocational training and college preparatory courses. Blacks are assigned to special education classes and are victims of the "pygmalion effect." Few blacks are enrolled in any form of higher education. In Oregon black enrollment in higher education rose from 1,812 in 1970 to 2,083 in 1976. Another study done by the Portland State University found that black enrollment had actually declined between 1970-1976. Black enrollment in professional schools is nonexistent or very low.[1] About 75,000 blacks live in Oregon.

Segregated Schools

Black children in Portland have attended segregated schools since 1867

when the school board built a separate school for the 25 blacks. Five years later the board closed the school and dispersed the black students into white schools. By 1900 a segregated housing pattern developed in the inner northeast Portland, now called Albina. Most blacks attended the Elliot and Holladay schools. Racial isolation of blacks increased along with their growth in numbers. The Portland black population grew to about 2,000 by 1940, 10,000 by 1950 and 25,000 by 1980. To-date Portland blacks have been victims of de facto segregation in the Albina district. And until 1968 the vast majority of black children attended almost all black schools. In fact in 1968 The Oregonian editorialized against the supreme court ruling against housing discrimination. Portland then experienced a 'minor' race riot.

In the current school year about 15% of Portland's elementary students are black, 68% of who attend one of the 17 schools with 20% or more black enrollment. Thirty nine of Portland's 86 grade schools have less than 5% black enrollment, while seven grade schools have more than 50% black enrollment. The majority of Portland's black and white students have gone to segregated schools. Currently a small number of blacks attend all white schools. All in all 20% of the 53,000 students in the Portland public schools are black.[2]

Since the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education case, school desegregation is the law of the land. Although there is no legal mandate for the desegregation of de facto segregation, according to the 14th Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as Oregon statutes, when a district does decide to desegregate it must do so in a manner which is not discriminatory. Soon after the 1954 Brown decision, the board noted that it had a policy of equal education but that it would take no action regarding desegregation in the Portland Public Schools. This policy of official "color blindness" persisted until April, 1962 when the NAACP charged that the Portland schools were segregated.

Concern over racial segregation in Portland's public schools first surfaced in the early 1960 s. In April 1962, the local NAACP charged that racial segregation existed in the Portland public schools. At the time black students were concentrated at Boise (96%), Eliot (96%), Humboldt (88%), Highland, (now called King - 79%), and Holladay (56% - now closed).

The NAACP made no specific recommendation but asked that the district admit the problems and that it should do something about it.

In the fall of 1962, representatives of the national NAACP visited Portland and suggested two options for desegregating Portland schools. First, pairing. Second, new schools should be built on the boundary of black and white communities so as to bring about desegregation by establishing new attendance areas.

In response to this, The Oregonian editorialized (April 22, 1962) that desegregation was not a viable solution for Portland. The paper said that carrying out the NAACP recommendations would be arbitrary and would not address the real problem of "cultural deprivation" in Black communities. The paper warned that implementing these suggestions would create white animosity and impede progress toward the ultimate solution of housing integration.

In the spring of 1963, the Portland School Board initiated the planning of a "crash program" to improve the social, cultural, and eductional conditions in the Albina community. In response to this proposal the local NAACP claimed that the "crash program" did not address the issue of racial segregation. The NAACP added that black children would continue receiving inferior education if they remained in segregated schools.

The Schwab Committee

As a result of increased public attention to school desegregation and equal education, the school board dropped the "crash program" and in July 1963 appointed a Blue Ribbon Committee, "The Committee on Race and Education", also named after its chairperson Schwab, to examine segregation and low achievement of blacks in Portland schools and to come up with recommendations. Five of the 46 committee members were black. The committee concluded that the Portland schools were not providing all children with equal educational opportunities.[3] It could not and did not agree, however, on how to remedy the situation. It stressed the need for improving education of "disadvantaged" and black children within the black community. It did recognize segregation as a factor in unequal education. It recommended establishing "Model Schools" in the "disadvantaged" or black community to provide compensatory education. It suggested that the district embark on a desegregation program and establishing a voluntary transfer program whereby all

parents would be able to transfer their children to any school with space within the district. A less known but perhaps more significant committee recommendation was that the school board prepare a master desegregation plan and present it to the community for continual evaluation and revision.

The Portland school board adopted the report of the "Committee on Race and Education" in October, 1964. The Board said that it would work toward: 1) reducing racial isolation, 2) reducing class size in overcrowded schools, and 3) offering stimulating education opportunites to those who would profit from them. The board indicated that this would be accomplished through the "Model Schools Program" and an "Administrative Transfer Program". The MSP was to achieve the following goals: 1) reducing class size from 30 to 20; 2) establishing preschools in Albina; 3) adding teacher aids and community-school workers to the black dominated schools;4) providing better instructional materials in Model Schools; 5) adding reading specialists to the Model Schools; 6) reducing teacher turn-over; and improving community involvement in schools. Teachers in the MSP were paid an additional $1,000 per year as 'premium pay' which also became known as 'combat pay'.

The ATP and MSP

The Administrative Transfer Program, according to the Portland education establishment, was intended to bring about racial integration and equal educational opportunity. ATP directed its aim at encouraging, recruiting and in fact coercing black students from Albina to transfer to white schools outside of their neighborhood. The Board pursued two contradictory plans: improving schooling within the black community while at the same time transferring black students out of their schools to white suburban schools. Furthermore, these measures happened to be adopted at the time of the 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Although the Portland School Board paid some of the MSP and ATP costs, about 70% of the 8 million dollar expenditures were covered by the State and Federal subsidies.

The MSP which lasted from 1965-70 accomplished its objectives only in part. The program was beset with the usual problems. A Portland City Club study found that the impact of the MSP on the achievement of the target population was negligible and "inconclusive".[4] The same study

pointed out a lack of systematic studies, evaluation and procedures in the Portland school system.

The Administrative Transfer Program initially provided transportation for about 600 black students per year who were attending white schools on 'space available' and 'voluntary' basis. From 1965-70, the ATP had negative and/or minimal impact on racial desegregation in Portland schools.[5]

By 1972 it became clear that the MSP had failed to have a significant impact on the achievement of black and disadvantaged students. Thus its impact on equalizing educational opportunities was unclear. The district had also failed to develop a long range plan for school desegregation and equal education. Decisions concerning MSP and ATP were based on expedience and intuition.

Portland Schools For the Seventies

In 1969 the Portland School Board hired a new superintendent - Dr. Robert Blanchard. In January 1970, Blanchard submitted his plan "Portland Schools for the Seventies" [6] which focused on: 1) declining student enrollment, 2) lack of adequate vocational education in the Portland schools, and 3) the need for greater variety in the curriculum. At the time a new force called "Citizen's Committee for Better Schools" appeared on the scene and made its position clear to all. The Committee considered equal educational opportunity a primary concern and school desegregation as a means to achieve that end. The Committee also expressed serious concern about racial isolation and its ramifications for all. The Committee felt that the Blanchard plan did not place enough emphasis on desegregation at the early grade levels and that it did not spell out the exact mechanisms for black parents' participation in education. But more importantly, the Committee termed the Blanchard plan clearly discriminatory. Pressure was building up in Albina.

In March 1970, the school board adopted a revised version of the Blanchard plan. The plan divided the Portland School District into three areas in a manner that subdivided and fragmented the black children and community among the three areas. The revised plan also reinforced the open enrollment and the Administrative Transfer Programs. Students could transfer to any middle or high school in the district provided there was space and provided the percentage of minority students at a given school

did not exceed 25%.[7] The plan established middle schools (6-8 grades) throughout the district except the Albina area. It also converted all the grade schools in Albina into Early Childhood Education Centers (ECECs). The board and the Superintendent realized that the MSP and ATP had failed to desegregate the schools or provide equal education. Therefore, they eliminated all grade schools in Albina and the blacks had no choice but to be bused out to different schools.

Consequently the "Schools for the Seventies" drew criticism from the NAACP, community organizations, and concerned public. They accused the board of: putting all the burden on blacks, stigmatizing black students, not integrating the grade schools, not providing for black participation in decision-making, relying on mathematical formulas instead of process, manipulating the citizen advisory boards, and not going far enough in desegregating and equalizing the schools. It was partly due to this that the Portlanders defeated a school bond measure in May of 1971.

The ATP began in 1962 and with 359 students and grew to about 3,000 students in the current school year. About 90% of ATP students are black. Black students from Albina have been bused 'voluntarily' and involuntary to some 55 schools covering a distance of 1.3 to 12 miles all over the district. Many ATP students find themselves in classes or schools without any of their black friends. And often these students have long school days since they are the first to be picked up in the morning and the last to be dropped off in the afternoon. The receiving school decides how many ATP students to admit regardless of the "space available" guidelines.

Institutional Racism

ATP students encounter numerous problems at the other end of the bus line. They experience racial jokes and slurs. They are ostracized and forced to stay in self-segregated groups. There have been many gang fights between black and white students. They are isolated, scattered and lack peer support since their number in white schools range from one to a maximum of 50. Even siblings are scattered around. They are stereotyped, tracked, avoided and given social promotion by teachers. The curriculum, school climate and the level of affluence amongst their white school-mates are all alien and hostile to blacks. ATP students are punished more harshly,

suspended more frequently, unfairly and for longer periods and are expelled more often. Receiving schools use federal funds for the benefit of white students. Black students rarely if ever see black adult role-models in the receiving schools. School staff has little or no training in multicultural education. Few black students and fewer of their parents participate in extracurricular activities. Attrition for black transfers was 17% in 1976-77, double the rate of resident students. In 1975-76 20% of the black transfer seniors dropped out of school.

At the height of the busing program some 3,000 blacks were bused to 55 elementary and 9 high schools throughout the entire district. Two thousand of these students had chosen to transfer but about one thousand were forced to participate in the program since all the upper grade schools in Albina were eliminated and/or changed into Early Childhood Education Centers (kindergarten to fourth grade). In a few cases even lower elementary grade students were displaced.

The following items illustrate what the black ATP students must deal with. In preparation for the arrival of some 30 black ATPs in the fall of 1973, the principal of a white upper class elementary school told his staff jokingly, "You know, I guess we had better not call it chocolate milk any longer. It would probably now be more appropriate to refer to it as black milk." At the same school on the second day of classes a white child climbs the school fence and greets the black students as they get off the bus "Here come the black Sambos!" "Here come the black Sambos!" A first grade teacher is collecting 40 cents for lunch from students. Her one black student gives her a nickel. The teacher tells the researcher "What am I supposed to do with this? Lunch is forty cents. Do you think this is all they pay in the poor schools?"[8] In another white middle class suburban school a fourth grade teacher is conducting a discussion on science. A black student volunteers and gives the correct answer. The teacher tells her "... I didn't know that <u>you</u> could do it right!"

The ATP consisted of one-way busing and the scattering of blacks throughout the entire district. It was designed to do precisely that. In response to a newspaper question on whether whites could be bused into his school, the white principal of a 90% black elementary school said : "The idea of busing white kids in here is unthinkable. They would get eaten

alive. This school has a strong pecking order in which physical prowess and the ability to socialize according to the rules of urban Black culture are the main determinants of status. Most white students, even those strong enough to defend themselves physically, aren't used to the social rituals of a Black school--the dancing, the clothing, the jive. Whites may be accepted, but they do not become leaders.

A white kid cannot excel here. In fact, we've had several requests from white parents to have their kids bused out, which we can't do."[9]

The roof fell in. There were cries of racism, calls for the resignation of the principal, and an investigation of district policies regarding black children. The Superintendent, the Board, the principal and some of the 'civic leaders' attempted to stonewall this outrageous statement. But the incident awakened the black community and its white sympathizers, focused attention on segregation and desegregation in Portland and polarized the city.

These developments coincided with a desegregation policy adopted by the Oregon Board of Education in 1974. It states that it is the duty of each school to desegregate so that none of its schools has a minority enrollment of more than 50%. The Portland School Board too had earlier in the report by "The Committee on Race and Education" adopted 'a policy' of school desegregation. However, in practice the district either failed to desegregate its schools or did so entirely at the expense of the blacks. The education establishment came under severe criticism from many quarters in the city.

The Community Coalition for School Integration

This coalition was formed out of community opposition to proposed Portland School Board policy dealing with "racial imbalance" at Jefferson High School. During the 1976-77 school year minority enrollment at this school exceeded 50%, thus putting it in non-compliance with state guidelines on racial balance. The board policy would have mandatorilly bused high school students from predominantly black neighborhoods to predominantly white suburban high schools.

In July 1977, a number of individuals and groups began their opposition to the proposed redistricting plan. Opposition focused on the discriminatory nature of forced busing of black students only. The board deferred action

on the plan and asked the NAACP, the Urban League of Portland and the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission to suggest alternatives for dealing with the problem of racial imbalance at Jefferson High School. In the summer of 1977 these three organizations invited all interested people to join in dealing with the board policy. It soon became apparent to the CCSI that a district-wide examination of the board's desegregation policy was necessary. The Coalition set out to identify common concerns regarding school desegregation in Portland and to come up with policy recommendations for equal educational opportunities for all.

The CCSI embarked on a comprehensive analysis of school desegregation in Portland. It grew to include some 105 individauls and 38 organizations. It received substantial financial support from a variety of people and organizations. It was an open, independent and diversified body. The Coalition spent 15 months on the issue and presented its 350 page report "Equity for the Eighties"[10] to the Portland School Board on November 27, 1978. The report contained specific recommendations on every aspect of education and desegregation in the district. It dealt with administration, student transfer, curriculum, teacher training, student discipline, minority hiring, minority teacher placement, advisory boards, housing, and future board relations with the CCSI itself.

The results of these investigations indicated that Portlanders shared four common concerns about school desegregation: equity, inter-racial understanding, quality education and neighborhood integrity.

The CCSI considered the Portland School District desegregation efforts as piece-meal, fragmented, callous, expedient and superficial. CCSI found out that there was no central authority responsible for the ATP, MSP, ECECs, middle schools, and the Jefferson magnet program. Furthermore, the CCSI found little evidence of research, data, evaluation, or any kind of system utilized by the district. The Coalition charged that the district's desegregation programs place a greater burden on the blacks forcing them to attend a school in alien environments. The Coalition observed that the accommodation of white children in the ECECs displaces some black children. White students in the ECECs could transfer to other schools whenever they wished. But black students in the ATP could not return to their neighberhood schools. No grade school or middle school

was provided in Albina but such provisions were made available in white neighborhoods. Many blacks were forced to attend schools outside their community but no whites were bused into the black community.

The CCSI charged that the Portland School District had not provided equal education for all its students, even fourteen years after the Schwab Committee finding and recommendations to this effect. CCSI also found that in 1978 about 18% of blacks still attended segregated schools where blacks constituted more than 50% of the students. Seven schools were still racially isolated. CCSI documented the scattering of black children, inefficient administration and lack of leadership by the board, inequitable discipline, denial of equal chance, d sregard for the black culture and heritage, lack of teacher preparation to teach blacks, and discriminatory placement of minority teachers.

The school board acknowledged the CCSI report but did not take it seriously. Instead, it focused on the school superintendent's response to the Coalition. Dr. Blanchard, the superintendent, by then had proven his loyalty to the Portland white establishment and came to dominate and lead the school board, an instrument of that establishment. In turn the board and the influential elements among whites used the superintendent to insulate themselves against the blacks and the majority of the people. Blanchard dismissed the Coalition's work as an "overreaction". Disillusionment, frustration, a sense of insult and betrayal and anger followed.

These events coincided with some other revelations. During the 1978-79 school year the Oregon Minority Educators Organization, the Metropolitan Human Relations Commision in Portland, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of HEW, all found the Portland School District to be discriminating against black students. All of these organizations found out that the District followed double standards in interpreting discipline problems and that punishment and suspension was twice as high for blacks and even higher among those blacks who were bused to white schools. This confirmed black parents' fear and suspicion that their children bore the brunt of of desegregation.

At this point the Portland education establishment found itself under

conflicting pressures coming from its own conventionality, a dominant and trusted superintendent, the downtown establishment, white liberals and the blacks and their supporters. The board had to reconcile these pressures while maintaining legitimacy and effectiveness. Thus it generated a whole series of responses. It acknowledged some but not all of the findings and charges by the various coalitions and individuals. But it refused to acknowledge the underlying charges of inequity, burdening and discriminating against blacks. And it refused to accept the CCSI's most important recommendation of pairing as a way to desegregate.

The board also called the CCSI recommendations "immature, ill-timed and politically naive". It added that if it adopted pairing, the board would lose four of its members in the (Apirl 1979) election to more conservative candidates. CCSI in turn termed the board's response "purely political" to which a board member conceded that "there were political considerations". One board member stated that "I was concerned that pairing would produce a greater outflow of white families. I feel it can't be overlooked. It would affect how strong our public schools are, and what the support is for our financial base".[11] The Oregonian observed that the pairing proposal had "built-in explosives". But the paper also noted that during the six meetings between the board and CCSI the board did not deal with the substantive issues even once.

During spring 1979, the Portland public schools were again investigated by the U.S. Justice Department for charges of multiple discrimination. The board was cleared since its desegregation policy was "voluntary". At this point the CCSI began to dissolve but suspicion and resentment among blacks and a portion of whites continued to persist.

A group of white liberals insisted that the board continue its desegregation efforts. The group believed that desegregation goes hand-in-hand with quality education and that desegregation is not only a legal but moral-social mandate as well. Pointing to the many problems in the district, this group called for school closure and consolidation, boundary changes, two-way busing, and the establishment of magnet schools based on open admissions.

The Black United Front

Early in 1979 a new force called the Black United Front appeared on

the scene. This is a well-organized, sophisticated and more militant group with widespread support among blacks, but also many whites. The BUF has deepened and extended the struggle. The BUF believes that the Portland School District has embarked on its peculiar desegregation path for the following reasons. First, the district wants to "put a Niger in every window". Second, the district wants to circumvent community control of schools. Third, blacks are scattered in order for the district to shore up declining enrollments, keep schools open and thus preserve jobs. Fourth, the district is using blacks in order to receive and distribute federal money. Fifth, black students are scattered throughout the district in order to avoid charges of "all-white" schools and court-ordered desegregation. Sixth, the early childhood education centers are used to provide free childcare for white middle class children.

The Front questions both the theoretical-juridical underpinnings and practical outcomes of busing. It contends that desegregation/integration efforts are inherently based on racist assumptions, intended to assimilate blacks into the mainstream culture and socialize blacks into a colonized mentality. The Front asserts that the outcome of busing therefore is actually detrimental to blacks. That is why it says that busing is designed as "one way integration". By design, blacks are dispersed so that they do not pose a threat and arouse the racist anxiety and hostility of whites.[12]

The attitude of the receiving school staff is characterized by such comments as "Those kids (blacks) want what our kids want" and "None of the children ever talks about any of the students being black". "Now if there were 75 or 100 blacks at the school it would be different. But I don't think 28 would make any difference at all. We probably won't even know they are here". The school staff did not promote or accept interracial friendship either. When a first grade black indicated that he wanted Tim (his white friend) for Christmas, the teacher said "Donald, you're just being silly. Now, I want you to sit there quietly until you can think up something serious."[13]

To protect the board's desegregation plan, the BUF conducted a successful one-day school boycott on May 19, 1980, the birthday of the late Malcolm X. The board declared that it would implement its own proposed desegregation plan beginning fall term 1980. To this the BUF said

it would boycott the school system in the fall unless and until the board met the BUF demands. It was the Front's threat of a boycott in the fall of 1979 that forced the school board to come up with a desegregation plan for the district. The board first promised to meet many of the BUF demands but reneged on these promises later on and after the boycott was called off. The Front feels betrayed, manipulated and insulted. The Front called for the resignation of school superintendent Dr. Blanchard.

The BUF Proposal

The Front submitted its elaborate proposal to the board in February 1980. One Albina school would be converted from an Early Childhood Education Center to a middle school (6-8 grades). Another near-Albina school would be reopened as a middle school. There will be no changes in the boundaries or in the logistics of racial mixing. There will be changes in school conversions. The Front states that its proposal would impose minimal costs and disruption while providing an ideal setting for the neighborhood and transfer students from the area. The BUF asked that the proposed two middle schools be named after black persons. The Front plan provides for parental option to send their children to any school in the district. The plan does not, however, provide for any kind of recruiting or counseling and it is clearly opposed to the use of magnet schools as an attraction for getting blacks out of Albina. The Front places no emphasis on desegregation but urges quality education and freedom of choice for all.

The Front considers school curriculum an important ingredient of quality education. It points out to the pitfalls of the district's Scope and Sequence in regard to black students and it urges major curricular modifications. The Front demands that the curriculum in predominantely black schools must be based on black scholarship and the black experience from Africa to America. The Front asks for a much more challenging and demarding curriculum and high achievement for black children. It asks for smaller classes in order that black aspirations can be realized. And it pledges full community support for the children's education.

The Front's proposal includes the hiring of a black as the district's personnel director who will in turn engage in active recruitment of black staff, principals and teachers for the Portland schools. The Front demands

immediate involvement of black parents in the selection of staff and teachers. It asks that the district reconstitute its Staff Selection Committee and that it should constitute parent review panels in each school. These panels are to review all hirings within their schools and make recommendations to the district's Staff Selection Committee.

The Front suggests that the district develop a comprehensive affirmative action plan that will move representation of black administrators, staff and faculty up to 20% of the district's personnel and make it congruent with the 20% black enrollment in the district. The Front asks that the district must hire immediately a black as personnel director who will work with black agencies and the community for the development of an affirmative action plan.

According to the Front's proposal the personnel department should be directed to compile a complete and full inventory of all the black personnel in the district, assess the district's personnel needs over the next five years, and inform current minority workers as well as all the black organizations in Portland about these needs. The personnel department should embark on active minority recruitment throughout Oregon. The department should continue constant communication with major black organizations about staffing. And finally the Front asks the district's personnel department to make periodic reports about staffing to the board.

The Front asked that principals in predominantely black schools should meet these criteria. They must be autonomous, supportive of their staff, visible in every aspect of the school, committed to quality education for blacks, provide effective leadership for their staff and teachers, be open to and actively supportive of parent involvement, and pursue good school-community relationship.

The Front developed the following criteria for teachers in black communities. They must possess and insist on high academic standards. Their teaching must reflect multi-culturalism. They must be well-versed in the black culture. They must make their teaching relevant to the black experience. They must individualize instruction and design individualized education programs for those who are below grade level. They must be demanding.

The Board's Desegregation Plan

The Portland School Board released what it called a new Comprehensive Desegregation/integration Plan in January 1980.[14] The plan provides for the following. It eliminates elementary school enrollments which are more than 50% minority. It provides for the establishment of one middle school in the Albina area. It creates new and improved early chilhood education centers in the district. It provides for stepped-up multicultural education in Portland schools. It reduces the scattering of black children. It provides for the immediate hiring of black consultents to advise on all educational matters. It provides for advisory role of the existing parent advisory committees in staff selection. It mandates in-service training for the teachers. It creates an academy of back-to-basics, a program for the gifted and an art magnet in one of the high schools.

The problem with this proposed plan was that it lacked a single-strategy approach. It was not really all that comprehensive. It leaves the entire West Portland out. It was piecemeal dealing with the problem on school-by-school basis. It relied on boundary changes, voluntary transfer, magnet schools and some pairing. More importantly the plan did not really deal with the concerns of blacks, it did not go far enough and it lacked urgency. Further, the Front objected to the plan on the ground that the idea of promoting racial balance is inherently racist. Also the Front charged that the plan does not address the focal black demand of quality education for blacks in their own community. The Front is not interested in busing, transfers, racial balance or disegregation per se. The Front in essence is pushing separatism, without saying so. It wants to challenge state and federal guidelines concerning racial balance. But violation of these guidelines could get the district in legal and financial trouble. Also it would make the board appear to renege in a previous promise to liberal blacks and whites about the desireability and implementation of desegregation. The pursuit of equity through desegregation is a given for the board.

The district's plan is based on the liberal conviction that a racially balanced classroom is ipso facto , an advantage. The Portland educational establishment, the CCSI and most white Portlanders believe this. But the Front does not. Supporters of desegregation are not persuaded by evidence

that desegregation per se does not improve black achievement, their self-esteem or interracial relations. Thus the board feels committed to racial balance and it is the board that makes the final decision. But the Front and many of its supporters kept insisting on their demands.

Through the summer of 1980 the BUF prepared for and threatened a protracted school boycott while indicating it was willing to dialogue with the board on the outstanding issues. The Front was adament about its demands, including the resignation of the school supperintendent.

Firing the Superintendent

By Spring 1980, deep divisions surfaced between the progressive and conventional members of the Portland School Board. Furthermore, relations between the board and the superintendent deteriorated to the point where the four progressive members of the board could not work with the superintendent. Critics accused Dr. Blanchard of poor leadership, poor management and poor working relation with the board. More importantly he was accused of being a tool of "the downtown establishment", obstructing school integration, waste and racism. He was also charged with promoting his own ambitions. Consequently, the BUF called for his resignation and/or firing by the board. On June 16, 1980 the board voted 4 to 3 to fire Dr. Blanchard. Those who voted for his firing were the only black, only woman, and two progressive (all four new) members of the board.

The event triggered one of the most heated political struggles in the city's history. Some called it a necessary and overdue decision. Others called it immature and invitation to education chaos. One day after the firing, some 25 of Portland's "civic and financial leaders" "the movers and shakers of things" met in the board room of a savings and loans bank to launch a well-financed, well-coordinated campaign to recall the four board members who voted for the firing. Some of these people do not even live in the district. This group, calling itself The Citizens Committee for a Responsible School Board, charged the school board with inexperience, immaturity, weakness, irresponsibility, poor judgement, poor management, incompetence, radicalism, unfairness, inconsistency, constant bickering, arrogance and so on. The group hired as its director, John Conally's Oregon campaign coordinator. Because of assured funding the group launched a massive effort for the recall.

Two days later the BUF decided to recall the three board members who voted against firing the superintendent. The front's co-chairman told the press that "Mr. Blanchard ran an educational system that maimed the lives of thousands of children." The Front organized two quick boycotts against the bank whose board chairman spearheaded the so-called Citizens Committee for a Responsible School Board and against Portland's largest shopping center. A city paper called the boycott "a bully's act of intimidation" and "misguided" which "invite a period of political thuggery in the city."

The two recall movements were launched full force. Bickering, controversy, charges and countercharges, dominated the educational-political scene. Dr. Blanchard sued the school district. Many were overjoyed over the firing and the emergence of the "new majority" in the board. Some bemoaned the "irresponsible and vindictive" board decision for firing "one of the most stable and longest tenured superintendents in the country." People worried about the "recklessness" of some of the members, "polarization" in the city; "mixing race and power", "the rise in black militancy". The board tried to deal with all of this while being under siege.

There was concern about the social, economic and political costs of recall and special election. Some were concerned with the "city's image". Some objected to "the downtown establishment" wielding its power around and saw the firing as a victory for the people. Others expressed anxiety about "the blacks and white radicals taking over the school system". Prominant politicians, civic organizations, groups and the press appealed for "calm", "reason", "healing", and changing things through normal elections. These people called on leaders of the two recall movements to cancel their drives. But the leaders refused to call off the recalls.

It soon became apparent though that neither group could muster sufficient signitures in order to register petitions. Meanwhile, Dr. Blanchard died of a heart attack five months after his firing. People realized that three of the four board members who voted for firing the superintendent would be up for election in March 1981. At this juncture the city had to focus its attention on the serious issues of large deficits, budget cuts, decreased state support, implementing a new comprehensive desegregation plan, declinning enrollments, the necessity to close schools, search for a new superin-

tendent, board election, and other problems. Numerous activities, debates, hearings, appeals, charges and countercharges followed.

Citizen Input

Many of Portland's civic organizations and individuals spoke out on segregation and desegregation in the Portland schools, the board's policies and on the BUF demands. The American Friends Service Committee which has been monitoring Portland schools and the board's policies and suggesting alternatives for handling discipline problems, spoke out. AFSC stressed equity, quality, integration, pairing, and citizen involvement in decision-making. In essence, AFSC came out in support of the BUF position. [15]

The Portland Urban league too spoke in sport of the Front. It rejected mere desegregation, racial balance and one-way busing. It pointed out that most white schools are in fact segregated and isolated. The league urged true integregation, pairing and a massive assault on racism in schools as well as the city. [16]

Portland's league of Women Voters expended much effort and energy on the issue. The league recognized the serious problems pointed out by other organizations and it basically sided with the BUF. The league observed that achieving effective integration would require some boundary changes and school closures. [17]

The Portland Metropolitan Human Relations Commission stated that a sound educational experience must be based on an integrated setting, equity in the process of integration, and quality education. MHRC demanded that the Portland School Board uphold the aforementioned principles. MHRC supported the idea of boundary changes as well as the concept of desegregation/integration. But it spoke against the idea of magnet middle schools and restrictive admissions criteria. It supported the establishment of general academic and unrestricted middle schools. The thrust of MHRC's position is in accord with the BUF. [18]

Some white parents, students, teachers and community from northeast Portland, the area adjacent to Albina, formed The Committee to Support the Black United Front. This group came out in all-out support of the Front. It supported the school boycott, the boycott at the shopping center as well as the Front's proposal on education in Portland, [19]

At this point a portion of the media also spoke up advocating leadership, equity, quality, citizen participation and getting on with solving the many serious problems in the district. Implicit in these pronouncements was criticism of Dr. Blanchard, his three supporters on the board and the "downtown establishment." [20]

A diverse group of individuals and organizations formed an alliance of Citizens for Community Unity. The group asked that both recall movements be ceased immediately because they were divisive, destructive and distracting. The group urged Portlanders to support the desegregation and integration plan adopted by the board and to deal with the more pressing educational problems facing the city. It called on the board to demonstrate cooperation in working with the active superintendent, drop egoism, provide leadership and be more responsive and responsible. The group called on the community not to support any of the recall movements but to cooperate, participate and improve education.

Another group made up of some former school board members, a few 'civic leaders' and individuals who were defeated in the election to the board, formed a shadow organization of Committee for Good School Board Members. This Committee has been recruiting, promoting, funding and 'training' school board candidates for the March 31, 1981 election. The Committee's goal is to dislodge the three progressive board members (a women, a black, and a 'radical') who are up for election. The group accused the Front of "policical intimidation" and it accused the board of "doing the bidding of the Front."

By the summer of 1980, the Portland School Establishment was on one hand under siege and on the other in a position to adopt some serious progressive steps. There was the impending boycott threat by the BUF. The old superintendent had been replaced with a progressive and cooperative acting superintendent. The "new" majority on the school board had prevailed. Numerous people had spoken for significant changes and in support of the BUF. The "downtown establishment" had experienced a momentary set back. And all Portlanders became acutely aware of the grave problems facing the district.

Consequently the board presented its revised Comprehensive Desegregation Plan [21] to the city on August 30, 1980. The plan included some of the following steps. Parents will be included in the hiring of teachers and

principals in those schools affected by the desegregation plan. The board will seek changes in federal and state regulations (The Singleton Rule) requiring the dispersement of minority teachers for desegregation purposes. The board hired competent black consultants to advise on multicultural education matters. A new magnet middle school named after Harriet Tubman, offering high quality programs in computor science, foreign languages and the arts, was established in Albina for immediate opening. Old Early Childhood Education Centers are to be improved and new ones opened. Some boundary changes will be made. The pairing was to be implemented. Scattering of black students will be reduced somewhat. Staff and teacher in-service training in multicultural education will be stepped up. The district hired a black woman as personnel director. Effort will be made to recruit black teachers and staff from out of state. And the board has promised to make a special effort to see if it can hire a black or minority for superintendent. The board and the acting superintendent have made written commitment to implementing the aforementioned plan. Noting the "positive commitments" by the board and "possibilities of progress", the BUF decided on August 30 to deferr its threatened boycott for the coming fall. But it said that the board had been "unreliable" in the past and that there will be a boycott if it reneges on its commitments. These developments reduced tensions temporarily and the situation was praised by all the parties involved.

Problems of Implementation

The board is in a severe dilemma. The BUF demands meaningful participation in teacher and principal selection because it charges that "the professionals have failed our children. It is time for black parents to have some say in educating their children." The district's teachers say "We oppose it and we won't back away from our position." If the board meets the demand of blacks, it risks a teacher strike and letigation. If it does not, it risks a school boycott by some 8,000 black students. The board's task has been to reconcile some degree of community control and professional autonomy. The board's policy provides for parental advice on the kind of teachers and principals they want for black children.

The BUF says that it wants participation not an advisory role in the process. The Front charges that the existing parent advisory committees are hand-picked by the principals. It suggests a districtwide committee of nine

(four parents and five administrators) and reveiw panels of parents at the school level. District teachers too agree to parental advice but are opposed to parent participation. The teachers point out to the sanctity of professional autonomy and integrity, legal, practical, and personal and political (meaning racial) aspects of the BUF demands. The BUF states that those closest to children, that is parents, should have a say in how they are educated. Further, that such parental involvement already takes place in middle and upper class communities. But the poor and minorities are and feel excluded from education. The front also points to the historical and legal bases of parental involvement in staff selection. The BUF points out that it is not interested in power but in owning and improving their children's education. Blacks have no confidence in the education establishment.

The Portland Association of Teachers asked the Portland School Board that it be involved in those aspect of the desegregation plan that would impact the teachers themselves. PAT offered the board "help" and indicated that its Minority Involvement Program segment could help. The PAT supports the idea of integration in principle. But it declared a stronger concern with and commitment to protecting its own interest. The PAT demands that desegregation efforts must not threaten the status, authority, security and what it called responsibility of the teachers. It also stated that curricular changes with adverse effects on teachers would be unacceptable to PAT. PAT also indicated that it would oppose relaxation of the Singleton Rule through mandatory transfers of teachers within the district and suggested that such transfers should be voluntary and based on seniority. Intradistrict transfers may involve 100-150 teachers.

The PAT has strong reservations about inservice training in multi-ethnic education. It claims that most Portland teachers have already had such training. This is not true in fact. In any case, the PAT states that if required, such training must be conducted during school time or that teachers must get paid for it. The PAT added that it resented "being coerced" (by the Front) into multi-ethnic education. The PAT also came out against the idea of individualizing instruction. The PAT reminded the school board and the entire community that its cooperation was the key to the success of any desegregation plan.[22] Negotiations between the board, the PAT and the Front are under way. Earlier the PAT lobbied heavily against the Front's entire proposal.

Peripheral Issues

There are other issues involved in the struggle. A major step toward effective integration is a solid policy regarding hiring, placement and training personnel. About twelve percent of Portland's population, 8.7% of its teachers, 6% of its principals and only two of the high administrators are black. This has important implications regarding role-models for black students and black representation.

Staff and teacher training for multi-ethnic classrooms entail considerations of logistics and incentives. Training must be a systematic, districtwide, serious, high quality undertaking based on minimal disruption and appropriate incentives.

Generating community support for integration, especially voluntary desegragation is essential. This can be enhanced by public participation (input into the system) and communication (output from the education establishment). Some participation and communication mechanisms already exist, such as PTAs, Parent Advisory Committees and districtwide Citizen Advisory Committees. The board's meetings are open to the public. It also conducted about 30 public hearings on its desegregation plan. The board established a Desegregation Communications Steering Committee as well as an information center. However, the BUF still feels excluded and considers these measures as manipulative, token and for the white middle class.

Although the district has developed a document Scope and Sequence for its multi-ethnic curriculum, many questions concerning its scope, uniformity, future, teacher and staff support and evaluation need to be dealt with by the district.

BUF Persistance

Black children deserve and need quality education at their neighborhood schools. The Front asserts that after fifteen years of transferring black children to white schools outside of Albina "we can find no academic or psychological reasons for continuing this process", whether it is done by busing , boundary changes or clustering. The BUF contends, and with some empirical evidence, that the overall achievement of blacks in desegregated schools has not improved significantly. The Front points to the negative impact of desegregation on black children. In view of this, the BUF insists

that the district focus on equity and quality in the seven schools in Albina, rather than continuing a failure-ridden path of racial balance. "We do not subscribe to the notion that black children cannot learn when they make up the majority of a school's population."

The BUF demands that the district's policy of recruiting or "counselling" blacks to attend schools outside of their community must stop. It adds that the district is morally obligated to provide transportation for those blacks who choose or are forced by lack of schools to attend white schools. The Front says that in this respect, what is good for white students is good for blacks too. To the BUF the issue is not what is legal but what is "moral and just."

The BUF argues that blacks have a constitutional right to attend the school of their choice regardless of numbers, and that desegregation laws never intended to impose numerical racial balances through coercion. A BUF witness argued that in Brown vs. Board of Education decision, "Separatism was not the real evil. The real evil was the subordination of blacks to whites." Lack of academic gains, high attrition, tension, high rate of explusion and suspension make the value of desegregation doubtful. The BUF witness stated that busing low income blacks to upper income white schools is "like dropping them into Mars." He asked the board to abandon its long-held racist belief that black children cannot learn alone.[23]

The BUF challenges the idea, principles, outcome and practical aspects of desegregation. The BUF seeks quality education in its own community. It contends that desegregation hurts black children and that it has not contributed to interracial friendship or harmony. The BUF points out that in the past blacks wanted integration but now they want separation because "subordination is worse than segregation." The BUF intimates that black adults and children cannot trust whites or the education establishment.

The blacks feel that they live on the edge of the American dream. They talk about racism and revolution. The BUF agenda is to build a strong community in charge of its own life and the control of education, so central to their lives, is a step toward self-determination. The blacks talk about justice, suffering, survival, conscience, and integrity. The board and its white middle class support system are looking for appeasement and compromise. The BUF demands that the board delivers on its legal mandate and

promise of quality education. The BUF is trying to make the city accountable for the miseducation, emotional battering through scattering, lower achievement and other costs of black children.

The Front is not interested in mixing black and white children. It knows that the educational system, like the social system, is basically hostile to blacks. It talks about scientific-institutional racism in schools. The BUF questions how black children can come out of such a system, with a sense of their past, belief in themselves, a commitment to their people and the ability to cope well with life in America. The blacks say that the problem is lack of resources without and not lack of strength from within. Blacks need insulation from racism, the continuation of their heritage and a belief that they have a future. The BUF charges Portland Schools with failure to help in any of this. [24]

A temporary truce prevails at this juncture. The board and the acting superintendent are preoccupied with money. The district is in deep trouble. A citizen's advisory committee just recommended the closure of two high schools and three elementary schools, all in the low-income minority region. Massive budget cuts are under way. The people will vote on a major levy March 31. Two of the progressive board members are campaigning to retain their positions. The teachers and the district just concluded contract talks. Many teachers (500) are wondering if they will be laid off. The BUF feels victorious and is waiting and working on other issues. "The downtown establishment" is secretly working and hoping to install three agreeable board members.

Summary

Any understanding of school segregation and integration has to be multidimensional. There are many factors involved: race, class, ideology, fear, hostility, objectivity and subjectivity, power, politics, jobs, professionalism, the many governmental laws and agencies, civic organizations, vested interests, the community, economics, history, tradition, etc. This paper has been a study of differences, conflict and struggle. Minority vs. majority; the rich vs. the poor; blacks vs. whites; east-side vs. west-side; the northeast vs. the southwest; percentages of this vs. percentages of that; busses and neighborhoods; local vs. non-local; transfer vs. resident; the downtown establishment vs. the people; the education establishment vs. the citizens;

the powerful vs. the powerless. It should be clear that the school system occupies a central place in the life of a community where high stakes are involved. Paradoxically the struggle over the school system transforms it from a panacea to a battleground and cripples its functioning.

Notes

1. Willamette Week, July 17, 1978.

2. The City Club of Portland, Report on Racial Integration-Desegregation in the Portland Public Schools, Summer, 1980.

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6. Robert W. Blanchard, Portland Schools for the Seventies, January, 1970.

7. Portland School Board, Resolution #3553, March 23, 1970.

8a. Ray Rist, The Invisible Children: School Integration in American Society, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1978).

8b. Ray Rist, "Busing White Kids into Black Schools: Soluble or Insoluble?" Paper, March, 1974.

9. The Oregonian, September 24, 1973.

10. The Community Coalition for School Integration, Equity for the Eighties, November 27, 1978.

11. Willamette Week, January 14, 1980.

12. The Black United Front, Proposal, Portland, 1980.

13. The Oregonian, February 19, 1978.

14. Board of Education, Portland Public Schools, Desegregation Options: Draft II, January 30, 1980.

15. The American Friends Service Committee, "Portland's Education Project", March 6, 1980.

16. Portland Urban League, "Statement to the Board of Education," March 6, 1980.

17. League of Women Voters of Portland, "Statement to the Portland School Board," March 6, 1980.

18. Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, "Statement to the Portland School Board," March 4, 1980.

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19. The Committee to Support the Black United Front, "Position Statement," March 6, 1980.

20. KGW-TV, "Perspective on Recent School Board Actions," Editorials: June 16, 17, 18, 1980.

21. Board of Education, Portland Public School Board, Revised Desegregation Plan, August, 1980.

22. Portland Association of Teachers, Desegregation Position Statement, n.d.

23. The Oregonian, March 11, 1980.

24. The Oregonian, May 19, 1980.

Note: A complete documentation of this paper will be too cumbersome if not impossible. Data collection for the paper lasted from September 6, 1979 until March 12, 1981. Data collection included attending school board and community meetings, interviews, school visitation, regular reading of The Oregonian and the Willamette Week, and reviews of related work.